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TITLE: Implementation of Domestic Violence Screening as a Component of HIV Partner Notification in New York State (NYS)

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ISSUE: Domestic violence is a serious public health issue and can occur in any relationship, regardless of gender, sexual identity or sexual orientation. Notification of exposure to HIV can lead to, or increase, risk of domestic violence. Incorporation of domestic violence screening into HIV partner notification activities is critical to protect the safety of HIV-infected individuals. While such screening reflects good public health practice, it has yet to be established as a routine measure in most jurisdictions.

SETTING: Medical care providers, health and human service agencies and public health staff offering CTRPN throughout NYS.

PROJECT: Pursuant to legislation, the NYS Department of Health is implementing new public health activities focused on HIV reporting and partner notification. A protocol for the identification and screening of victims of domestic violence related to HIV partner notification is one component. Consultation with the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and statewide and community-based organizations followed a review of scientific literature, consultations with other jurisdictions and assessment of existing domestic violence screening tools. A screening process was developed for integration into ongoing activities.

RESULTS: A protocol, including a specific definition of domestic violence for purposes of HIV partner notification was prepared. Domestic violence screening was identified as a standard of practice within counseling and testing in NYS. Critical questions to explore risk of domestic violence in relation to notification of each partner were selected. Principles of domestic violence screening were developed and applicability of screening in relation to Ryan White CARE Act requirements for spousal notification was considered. Implementation issues such as referral links staff and medical provider training and instructions for documentation were considered.

LESSONS LEARNED: Experience in NYS can provide guidance to other jurisdictions seeking to integrate domestic violence screening into HIV partner notification. A simple screening process can minimize the potential for domestic violence related to partner notification and ensure that individuals at risk for domestic violence are offered referrals to needed services. New partnerships between HIV and domestic violence service providers can enhance service delivery and promote the safety of persons at high risk for HIV.

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